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AUTHOR Harker, Richard K.
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ABSTRACT

Problems raised by a conflict between culture of the school and culture of the pupil's home community are brought into focus when looking at schooling for children from a culture which has no links into culture of the dominant group, and in fact rejects as "worthwhile activities" the very things that members of the dominant group regard as most "worthwhile"; this situation exists for tribal Aborigines in parts of Australia. Three documents present part of a case study illustrating what cultural and social barriers mean in educational terms and describing difficulties and solutions that have been arrived at in two particular locations: Hermannsberg (N.T.) and Strelley (W.A.). The first document relates to efforts of Finke River Mission at Hermannsberg and describes the lack of success from schooling based on "normal" Australian models even after many years of effort by teachers. The second document summarizes the situation at Hermannsberg in 1979 and extends discussion into health, housing and land, where the same policies are being pursued. The third document describes a solution arrived at in a different situation where the community finances its own schools independently of outside organizations, such as state education departments or missions. (Author/ERB)

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SYMPOSIUM

EDUCATION, COMMUNITY CONTROL AND THE CURRICULUM

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EDUCATION, COMMUNITY CONTROL AND CURRICULUM:
A CASE STUDY OF TWO ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES,

RICHARD K. HARKER

Education is seen by many (Bourdieu (1977), Katz (1971), Apple (1979)) as the institution whereby society reproduces itself. Indeed many anthropologists define education as the institution responsible for the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. While it is clear that education does perform this function in all cultures, some cultures (most noteably those of European origin) no longer accept this as the sole function. These cultures have added the notion of social mobility, and to the extent that such views are widespread in the society, equality of opportunity is interpreted as giving to all individuals an equal chance to become middle class.

The problem is, in such large scale societies which have a variety of subcultural and cultural groups within their boundaries, "Whose culture is going to be transmitted through the educational institutions of that society?" In such societies the culture that is transmitted is that of the dominant political and economic group. Social mobility becomes defined as movement into (or out of) the dominant group, and equality of opportunity is measured by the amount of such mobility that occurs.

Clearly when such a notion of mobility becomes widespread in a community the curriculum of the schools will be geared to mastering the knowledge necessary to gain entry into the prestige group. Consequently the knowledge and culture that is transmitted in the schools is not that of the society as a whole but that of the dominant or prestige group.

The literature on the difficulties that occur when non-dominant group children are taught in schools which reflect the dominant group's culture has been largely confined in the sociological domain to studies of "working class" children. While it is true that this can be a problem area, there

in a sense in which middle class and working class are variants of an overall cultural heritage - perhaps they emphasize different aspects of this heritage but there are many aspects shared in common derived from the culture of the national state to which they belong.

The problems raised by a conflict between the culture of the school and the culture of the pupil's home community are brought into sharp relief when we look instead at schooling for children from a culture which has no links into the culture of the dominant group, and in fact rejects as "worthwhile activities" (c.f. R.S. Peters) many of the very things that the members of the dominant group regard as most "worthwhile". This is the situation which exists for tribal Aborigines in many parts of Australia. The documents included as a part of this case study illustrate what such a cultural and social barrier means in educational terms particularly. These documents describe both the difficulties faced and the solutions that have been arrived at in two particular locations: Hermannsberg (N.T.) and Strelley (W.A.).

The first document relates to the efforts of the Finke River Mission at Hermannsberg (Fargher, R. and R. Ziersch, School, Hermannsberg, 1974) and describes the lack of success that schooling based on "normal" Australian models had had even after many years of effort by teachers. Most of the failure would seem to be due to the complete lack of awareness on the part of the whites of the enormous cultural gulf that lay between themselves and the Aborigines. It is a tribute to the genuineness of the Finke River Mission's concern for the Aboriginal people that they were willing to abandon so many of their preconceived ideas about education and start to work within an Aboriginal framework in which schooling and particularly the curriculum became a negotiable item. The second document (A Synopsis of Finke River Mission's Approach to Aboriginal Affairs, March 1979) summarizes the situation at Hermannsberg in 1979 and extends the discussion into health, housing and land, where the same policies are being pursued.

It is clear that a radical change has taken place at Hermannsberg over the decade of the 70's. From a situation where the curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation systems of the school were clearly attempting to reproduce the knowledge of a quite alien culture (and through this to promote social mobility out of the home culture), they have moved to a situation where the Aboriginal cultures are acknowledged as legitimate and relevant sources from which to derive the structure and content of education.

The third document (Strelley Community School) describes the solution arrived at in a different sort of situation. Here the community finances its own schools independently of outside organizations such as state education departments or Missions. The solution arrived at however is essentially similar in that the curriculum is derived from the culture of the people, or from those aspects of European knowledge perceived as relevant to themselves.

These two communities highlight a fundamental contradiction in much contemporary thinking about education. On the one hand these communities represent a working out of the view that communities should be involved in the education of their children, and that in a multicultural society the various cultures should be expressed through the curriculum of the school. On the other hand we have the view that schools should be pursuing equality - equality in the sense of making, through schooling, the overall circumstances of children's education as nearly equal as possible.

In the two communities of this case study it is clear that the views are contradictory - the people concerned do not want their children to be the same as the children of white Australians, they want them to grow up as Aborigines. To ensure this they have taken over control of the education provided for their children. Here are two groups then who have taken steps to ensure that it is their own culture that is transmitted through the schools, and who also have opted out of the social mobility aspects of schooling which dominate the rest of the Australian school systems.

Is this what governments really mean by community participation? It is significant that both of these examples are from outside the state sector of education. The extent to which schools under the control of government are able or willing to make these kinds of adaptations will be a good test of the veracity of governmental claims to be pursuing a policy of multi-culturalism. One doubts in fact if the term "multicultural" has much meaning when used by public figures - it is in fact a popular slogan, which like all slogans tends to dull critical thought. Bullivant (1980) takes a critical scalpel to the term as it is used in Australia, and I will extend his argument here to cover New Zealand.

> " ...culture provides a problem solving, survival program: the patterned system of interdependent knowledge and conceptions, embodied in symbolic and non-symbolic communication modes, which a social group has evolved from the past and progressively modifies and augments to give meaning to and cope with the present and anticipated problems of its existence. On the other side of the coin are the social institutions which put the program into operation: for example the marriage and family, educational, legal, political, bureaucratic, economic and defence systems. As Despres has stated 'Culture ... is expressed through the institutional structures of society.'
>
> This is the crux of the matter. To Despres, a fully culturally pluralist (multicultural) society is one in which several ethnic groups with their individual cultural programs and their institutional systems attempt to co-exist within the same nation -state ... Is it feasible to have separate legal, political or bureaucratic systems ... Clearly the answer is no... But anything less than this is strictly not a fully multicultural society." (Bullivant, 1980:19).

It seems clear that Maori culture no longer supports a full set of institutions through which the culture is expressed - most noteably lacking economic and political independence. In such a situation where the minority culture still has force and meaning for individuals, Bullivant suggests the term poly (or multi) - ethnic, sharply rejecting the term multi-cultural.

He goes on to suggest that multiculturalism in education is nothing short of a confidence trick. While agreeing that cultural diversity enriches the lives of everyone, he suggests that the advocates of multiculturalism in education, go too far in giving support to three major themes, which have something of the "bandwaggon" about them: 6

1. that learning about other cultures increases respect for others and reduces prejudice and discrimination. There is little research evidence to support such a view and it ignores the fact that prejudice is a product of historical, political and economic circumstances and no unilateral action taken by schools can change that;
2. that increasing an ethnic child's self-esteem through teaching an "ethnic" course or two will enhance the child's capacity to perform well in school generally. Again there is no firm research to support this position.
3 according to Bullivant the cruellest of multiculturalism's false promises is that a culture based curriculum will give an ethnic child greater equality of educational opportunity and by implication enhance employment prospects. Such multicultural programs in school focus only on the expressive side of culture. Equality of opportunity in countries such as Australia and New Zealand has much more to do with social status, political and economic power, which are inevitably controlled by the dominant group.

This last point of Bullivant's links nicely back to the points made earlier sbout the meaning of social mobility (movement in relation to the dominant group) and equality of opportunity (the amount of such movement) within the community as a whole.

The notion of community as implicit in the case study documents needs redefining before being applied to a consideration of Maoris in New Zealand. Two points for such a reconsideration seem immediately obvious:

). Maori culture has only the remnants of an independent economic base. Individual Maoris, while finding continuity in the expressive aspects of their culture, must organize their lives around the political and economic institutions of the dominant Pakeha culture, which institutions also extend their influence

into surviving Maori social institutions such as the family and the marae;

2. A Maori middle class exists, which while it remains a small elite retains ties into the general Maori culture. But as this class grows it could become increasingly separated from what would then be seen as "mainstream" Maori culture, and may even make a "takeover bid" in the sense that Maoritanga would be redefined in terms of the new middle class group - the process of hegemonization which we should remember occurs within societies as well as between them.

In curriculum terms then, Maoris have a foot in two camps which can pull in opposite directions. It is the resolution of this conflict between the static aspects of education and the curriculum (education as the transmitter of a cultural heritage from one generation to the next, whether that culture be Maori, Aboriginal or European) and the dynamic aspects (education as the liberator of the individual from the strictures of his environment and the limited horizons of parochial communities) which lies at the heart of the current debate on Maori education. What are the options?

1. The Aboriginal communities in the case studies have resolved this conflict by rejecting the dynamic aspects which are associated by them with Europeans. It seems to me that this is not a realistic option for Maoris in New Zealand.
2. The logical alternative is to reject the static aspects associated with the traditional, tribal aspects of cultures and go completely for liberation - but liberation into what? Too often the answer is "Into a superior culture of course." That is to say, this alternative means assimilation.
3. An interesting alternative is the old idea of a "core" curriculum in which a body of knowledge necessary as a basis for participation in the political and economic institutions which underpin both Maori and Pakeha lifestyles is made available to all students.

> If such a core were to occupy say half of the curriculum, it is in the other half that community participation could be maximized, and community interests, needs and demands catered for.

Some such compromise in the curriculum (as is already happening in some schools) seems to be essential if our multi-ethnic society is to continue to be a good place to live for both Maori and Pakeha. Further, the compromise arrived at should be based on a sound basis of research into the nature of our society and the options open to individuals. We cannot continue to insulate ourselves from reality via the empty rhetoric of multiculturalism.

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SCHOOL, HERMANNSBURG, 1974

Roger Fargher and Rex Ziersch.

For some years now the Finke River Mission has been concerned about the educational programme at Hermannsburg, recognising that in the past the educational programme was not satisfactory as far as the Mission was concerned, for there was very low correlation between the amount of effort and resources that were provided and results, as far as we were concerned, in terms of academic progress. Associated with this was always the problem of non-Aboriginal teacher morale with a resultant high staff turnover. Over the past years we have managed to maintain a qulified staff who have generally been committed to their work and have been also prepared to give service for quite long periods of time. However, the problem remained, as far as the Mission was concerned, of poor motivation on the part of the Aboriginal students, with spasmodic attendance and consequent lack of results in our terms.

Going back to the time when the Mission applied a strong, coercive hand so that the children were regularly at school, we found that the picture remained much the same with very few students of the total number achieving anything more than a nominal grade three/four level of education. In short, we were led to the conclusion that the existing system was unsatisfactory as far as we were concerned. The lack of any real interest from Aboriginal adults in motivating their children, indeed, of even sending them to school at all, led us to the conclusion that the system was also unsatisfactory as far as they were concerned. Their expression of this was not so much vocally but rather through a passive acceptance of the school as our concern, and no real commitment or involvement on their part. This, then, led us to another conclusion, that the unsatisfactory nature of the school as far as both of us were concerned, could be solved by encouraging greater involvement and responsibility.

With this in mind, we deliberately set about raising the status of Aboriginal teaching assistants to that of non-Aboriginal teachers, aware of the fact that they did not have the skills and training of the non-Aboriginal teachers. The Aboriginal teaching assistants we sent away for further training generally did not complete their courses and, on their return to Hermannsburg, quite often showed no desire to teach in the school, seeking employment in other fields.

While we were successful to a large degree in involving the Aboriginal teaching assistants more fully in the school, it did not seem to solve the problem and the situation remained much the same as it was, unsatisfactory as far as the adult population was concerned, and with still unsatisfactory progress as far as we were concerned. The pattern of poor attendance and lack of concern and non-involvement were much the same. The only real difference was that a few of the Aboriginal teaching assistants to a small degree, took on some of our concerns. While they vocalised such concern to us, they were not prepared to carry this concern over into the adult population, their own children often being amongst the worst truants and the poorest achievers.

This led us to another conclusion - solving the problem of the unsatisfactory nature of the school, for both them and us, could not be done on a basis of piecemeal involvement (that is, with only a select few, the Aboriginal teaching assistants), but needed to be effected on a broad basis involving to a maximum degree the entire adult population. The problem was, how to do this.

We encouraged non-Aboriginal teachers to make up as wide a contact with parents as possible. However, this never really effectively reached any further than a commitment among staff in the staff-room meeting that it should be done. The non-Aboriginal teachers tried various gimmicks - distributing newsletters, giving reports to the parents, making visits - but were frustrated with their attempts as the discussions inevitably ended up in a one-way process, with the staff teacher having stated his business then finding himself totally out of his depth to find something to talk about that would be met with some degree of enthusiasm and involvement. They felt very awkward and uncomfortable, as did the Aborigines, and the situation, as far as the school was concerned, virtually remained the same.

However, still believing that the answer to the problems lay in maximum involvement, yet realising the history of the ineffectiveness of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers to bring this about, we were led to look for a more effective way to do so. Factors of insecurity and lack of any really organised systematic approach led us towards some organised and recognisable structure that we could work through to bring about this greater involvement.

In retrospect, this was more of a convenience for us that a meeting of the needs as far as the Aboriginal population was concerned. We were aware of some broad divisions in the adult population - the fact that some adults lived to the west of the compound area and some to the east of it, and that these two divisions were not always on friendly terms, evidenced by fighting, often causing bodily injury. We were also vaguely aware that within this broader division there were, in fact, smaller groupings which were often referred to as family groups by the Aborigines themselves. Our failure of the past in our attempts to involve the whole of the adult population led us to the conclusion that it might be more effective to involve the smaller units and in so doing have the whole adult population involved. With this in mind, we stimulated the formation of a structure that became known as the School Council, whereby each family group elected representatives to form this body. What we failed to do was to make any real attempt to really clarify who the families were and what made up their membership. To make for the more orderly running of the group, we encouraged the election amongst the group of a chairman, secretary and treasurer, as in any normal non-Aboriginal committee. We saw this Council as the means to bring about greater involvement in the life of the school. We encouraged the Councillors to draw up a set of rules (Constitution) by which they could operate and generally vested in this group decision making and control.

We were initially encouraged as, for a short period of time there was better attendance, and the answer to our problem and that of the adult population generally seemed to have been found. However, as time went on, we came to realise that we were back to where we had started; in fact, the more that control was given to the Council, the more we correspondingly encountered bigger problems of truancy and lack of achievement than had ever before been experienced. Instead of greater adult involvement from the population generally, the unsatisfactory nature of the school to the Aborigines - as previously mentioned - became vocalised, against both the Council as such and the Mission's managing of things generally.

The Council did not show much concern about the achievement of the children or any real concern for the maintenance of the buildings, equipment and grounds that they wanted to control, with the result that the

school deteriorated also in appearance. Nearly every window in the school was broken and vandalism was generally rampant, resulting in the almost complete demolition of the interior of the old Pre-School. There was no different pattern between the Councillors' own children and those of other generally, some of them being the worst offenders. We were prepared to live with this situation, believing it to be merely growing pains.

There was a continual power struggle amongst the Council, with the individuals attempting to gain a stranglehold over the employable positions and any economic ventures of which the Council was supposed to be in charge. The school canteen, for example, would have had a turnover in its lifetime of approximately $6,000 but ended up with a bad debt of approximately $500. Aboriginal employees were terminated indiscriminately by whoever had such control without any meaningful consultation or involvement of the other Councillors. This led to arguments and fighting with the person who had seized control relinquishing it, only for it to be taken up by one of the others, so that the whole process kept on cycling. It resulted in feuding outside the Council and generally increased tension and fighting between various groups.

Earlier this year the Department of Aboriginal Affairs gave the School Council a new Dodge truck. A similar pattern also developed with the truck, in that the group, as such, could not come to any real consensus as to the use of the truck, with varying individual Councillors claiming it as theirs. In turn, in using it for their own individual purposes, it did frequent trips into Alice Springs and generally became known as the "flagon wagon". On one of these trips, one of the Councillors was fatally injured as the result of falling off the back of the truck.

It was becoming increasingly obvious that our attempts to bring about the realistic involvement of the adult population within the educational programme was not practical (that is, was not working) and that we needed to question our initial assumptions and could no longer satisfactorily account for the general disorganisation as simply being the result of growing pains. We became more sensitive to comments that indicated that the adult population generally did not see the School Council as representing them, but that their business was basically purely "Council" business and was by and large separated from the life of the people generally, and that they saw no real part in it. We had been actively supporting the Council and largely directing the population through them. However, the fact remained that adults generally would by-pass them whenever possible bringing their concerns directly to the staff. The insistence on our part that they should see the Council often resulted in ill-feeling by the Aboriginal adults towards this attitude on the part of the staff.

With this, there came a realisation that this attempt of ours was also a failure and that we were back to where we had initially started with the added factors of the additional tensions created, school buildings in a very poor state of repair and truancy at its highest. We were literally forced to question all of our assumptions in the light of what seemed a number of contradiction. On the one hand, there was considerable pressure from Aborigines generally to have more control and say over their own affairs and a concern, too, that the children were being allowed to go their own way. Thus, what was more frustrating, as far as we were concerned, was that Aborigines generally were, at this stage, highly dissatisfied with the general state of affairs and were very vocal about this but, on the other hand, were not coming forward with anything that would be practical, that is workable, for them. In retrospect, this problem

could be summarized as essentially looking at the situation in our terms (our way) and trying to apply our normal solutions to these problems. It was just this very factor of us dealing with the problems in our own terms and categories that made it impossible for Aborigines to explain to us on their own terms what the problems were and what was practical (workable) as far as they were concerned.

It was from this perspective, then, that of attempting to communicate with Aborigines in their own terms rather than having them communicate to us on our terms, that we proceeded to come to a practical (workable) resolution of the problems confronting both us and them. For them to be able to explain things on their terms, the absolute pre-requisite was that we needed to make a real effort to learn for ourselves their terms and categories. So that we could get some understanding of how their family was socially organised, we needed first to understand their kinship system. This required a new set of skills on our part and we were fortunate in that one of our staff members had just returned from an intensive twelve months in the Anthropology Department of the Queensland University, concentrating primarily on this area of social organisation. With the special help of Anthropologists from the University, we proceeded to make a detailed analysis of the social situation at Hermannsburg, always trying to understand the social organisation as the people themselves did.

As a result of this, what has become quite clear is that the people living at Hermannsburg do not see themselves as a single homogenous group of "community" as we are accustomed to use this term. There are two quite distinctly different forms of social organisation with two distinct kinship systems, namely, the Aranda and the Loritja. We discovered, after having analysed the Aranda kinship system, that this system, as outlined by Spencer and Gillen in "Native Tribes of Central Australia" (1897) is still operating strongly today. However, there is evidence which suggests that there has been disintegration so far as the content of the relationship is concerned. So far, we have drawn up the majority of the genealogies. This has been necessary also to gain an understanding as to how various social units generally define themselves.

What has become clear is that there are a number of kinbased descent groups, which the Aborigines refer to as families, that define themselves on the basis of kinship and descent and in relationship to specific tracts of land. Each of these groups sees itself as separate from other groups through marriage and dreaming stories. They are quite emphatic when discussing these matters that certain knowledge or information is that family's business and they have nothing to do with it. There is a general reluctance even to talk about other families, particularly by certain families. Each of these groups has its own leaders whose authority is limited to his own particular group. When junior people in a group try to speak for the grown-up, the reaction of others is that he is really only talking for himself and, as far as the goup is concerned can be ignored.

To sum up to this point of time, the problem was essentially one of communication and understanding. In our attempt at encouraging the people to take responsibility and accountability for their own lives (self-determination) we expected them to do this and to explain to us how this could be done, but according to our own schemes and terms. In short, we were applying the solution we apply to our problems on to them. The nature of their problems, as we became aware later, was significantly different, so that our solutions, in fact, added to their problems. This

was evidenced by increased tension, increasedconsumption of liquor, fighting, and a general breakdown of social control.

However, in more recent times there has been a marked decline, particularly insofar as the tension between groups has been concerned, and there is certainly evidence to suggest very strongly that social control, particularly in relation to a number of groups, is certainly not the problem that it was and that a number of groups are genuinely accepting responsibility and accountability for their own lives.

As we understand the situation at present, this has come about due largely to two major factors. Firstly, we have made a concentrated effort to understand the social organisation as the people understand it themselves. The majority of the staff have a working knowledge of the two kinship systems and have quite a detailed knowledge of the majority of the genealogies. The second factor is that this knowledge that their continuing effort to try and see the situation as the Aborigines themselves see it, has meant that Aborigines have been quite enthusiastic in explaining to staff what is appropriate in their social universe, as they can do so in their own terms and according to their own classifications without having to use our schemes of understanding and interpretation. This has naturally meant that staff have had the added responsibility of having to learn and be sensitised to an alternate way of thinking, different from the way they usually think.

These two basic factors have meant essentially that Aborigines could make a start at communicating to us their ideas as to what was appropiate and what, from their point of view, was unworkable, as they could start to explain why, having some confidence that we were, in fact, attempting to understand. One of the first things that was communicated by many different people was that everything was mixed up. They then went on to explain that this was essentially in connection with their families, so they said that we should write down their families so that we would know to which family everybody belonged. It was during the course of collecting genealogies that it was explained to us that these people (referring to their own genealogy) were separate from other families and had nothing to do with the control of their family. They went of to explain how each family thought of itself as belonging to particular tracts of land and how, even though they were not living on their actual land, they still referred to themselves as belonging to particular country. Initially, when asked people haphazardly about genealogies, if the genealogies did not belong to their group, they would say, "That person belongs to such and such a country. I cannot talk about his family; you will have to go and see so-and-so." As our knowledge grew, other statements were made to us, such as: "Now you can see and understand that we are not all one big family living at Hermannsburg, but different, different families." There has been no evidence suggesting anything to the contrary.

We also came to know that, in each family group, there was always reference to the "biggest one" in the group and that extreme deference was always shown towards this person. He was referred to as their family leader of kaputa (head), or the boss for all their family. He is recognised by all the family. Now that we had some knowledge of these things, we frequently found that when we asked for opinions on certain things, we were referred to these men as the people said they could not say; it was up to the leader to speak. These were questions affecting the whole group. We also found that individuals in the group had to wait for their leader before they could do anything that affected the group as such. They also explained to us how, in the kinship system, there were senior terms and junior terms and how the most senior term was always held by the actual

leader of the group, so that leadership is determined by kinship and descent. They said to us: "Now you can see how we have no law for voting or for elections in our family." At this point, it is important to note that none of these leaders were on any of the councils. We enquired as to why there were not any of the real leaders on the councils. The leaders themselves say that there is too much "shame" because everybody knows that they are leaders and to be voted for and elected as leader is "shameful". It has also been voiced by a number of leaders that, if they were on a council, it would be humiliating and to be "just like a boy". In following this out as to its meaning, we were told that boys are not initiated and do not know the proper behaviour that is expected of them as initiated men. Knowledge and family affairs are seen rightfully as the exclusive property of the family. To have to discuss one's family business in the prescenceof, and with, other families' individuals is to have to behave like a boy who does not yet know what is the proper thing to do. On a number of occasions when a random group including, perhaps a leader, has been called together by an official of the Government, for example, wanting to discuss or report on something, the leaders have later come to us and said that the idea present would not work but only produce arguments and fighting. We have asked them what they said and whether they said it would not work, to which the answer has always been in the negative, affirming that people cannot talk about matters which will directly affect their family in front of people of other families. The only things that can be talked about in such agglomerate situations are the superficial things that are of no real concern to any family. It seems extremely difficult to talk about real family concerns in the presence of those who do not have any connection with one's family. We have noted on many occassions that, if a family leader is talking to us about his family and another Aborigine from outside his family comes along, the communication is abruptly ended, but when such a person leaves, it is again resumed as before. Much of the information we receive is given on the strict understanding that we will not discuss it with Aborigines from other groups. Particularly, knowledge in connection with ritual life is guarded very jealously as the exclusive property of the group.

What happened then in the Council situation was briefly this. Almost without exception the Councillors were very junior people without any significant status in their families. This meant that they were in no position to talk about any real concerns of their families and that they could talk only for themselves. This had two effects. The support that the Councillors received from the Mission and other outside bodies provided a power base for the individuals to exploit the situation for their own ends. Secondly, the families and leaders could rationalise what was happening as being business outside of their own family and, therefore, of no concern or consequence to them. However, there were consequences, in that individual Councillors gained power to hire and fire and to generally exercise control over members of other families, and to re-employ in favor of their own family. By traditional law, this was totally unacceptable and resulted in arguments and fighting as has been mentioned before.

A further factor, given the traditional form of school organisation, meant that Aboriginal teachers were forced into a situation where they were to control children of families where they had no lawful traditional right to do so.

Given this general situation, then, any desire that families had for their children to acquire non-Aboriginal skills such as reading, writing and calculation, had to be weighed against the interference of people outside of one's own family being involved in one's own family's business. The need to keep one's own family business separate took priority over the need to acquire these skills.

The tensions inherent in this situation of trying to make a number of groups, that see themselves as independent, operate as one, resulted early in March this year in one group completely opting out of the situation and decentralising. This has since been followed by a number of other groups doing the same. All of these groups have said that, if we want to be free, we must be separate. In all of these cases, the groups have decentralised according to the traditional patterns and by making proper arrangements with the proper people who have lawful Aboriginal title to land. A contributing factor here has been the way in which they have interpreted land rights.

It is against this background, then, that we sought to clarify what they wanted, and saw as workable, as far as educational services were concerned. The response to this can be summarised briefly as not wanting their children being mixed up with other families and wanting Aboriginal teachers from their own families working with their own children. Most groups requested a non-Aboriginal teacher of their choice to work with them in providing essentially non-Aboriginal type skills. There has been considerable concern expressed that children are not learning properly the rich heritage of their family. For example, the older people particularly have a complex knowledge of the naming, classification and functioning of the physical environment. It is only the older people in many instances who can pass on such knowledge and, if this does not happen, many of the people say that it will be lost forever. This type of knowledge cannot be transmitted by any one single individual but rather by various individuals at various times. We have encouraged our staff to become involved in these areas, not as instructors or organisers, but as learners and observers, and by so doing deepen their professional understanding of the totality of what is involved in Aboriginal education.

As we see the situation at present, the practical (workable) solution is to provide resources separately to the various groups. This enables various groups, then, to meet the needs of their own situation without beinginterfered with by other groups and being pre-occupied with the tensions that it produces. It simply means that the groups can get on with the business they want to, and make use of the resources in an economical manner. The problem would seem to lie in us providing the escape routes for certain individuals within groups who would use us to further their own private ends without any concern for their groups as such. The leaders put it this way, that individuals "pull themselves up" by hiding behind staff, or that we "grow up" certain individuals at the expense of the entire group and, in doing this, "rubbish" the group and its real leader. These individuals then simply play off the one system against the other. We simply see it, then, that the social units, that is, family groups, will much more feasibly become socially, spiritually, emotionally, economically independent, because there are inbuilt traditional structures to work at these needs. Thus it is more feasible to support these social units than to support individuals. In other words, rather than trying to innovate new structures to become physically independent of our society, it is better to use the structures the people know and that are, in fact, operating; that is, their own structures.

1974.

A SYNOPSIS OF FINKE RIVER MISSION'S APPROACH TO ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

MARCH 1979

PART I - PREAMBLE

1. The Aboriginal peole among whom the Finke River Mission (F.R.M.) works, belong to many distinct groups. The real social, spiritual, emotional and intellectual life of the people goes on within these individual groups and n not within the loose agglomerations of groups situated in various geographical locations that we have customarily called settlements or "communities".

2. The composition of these individual groups is complex and variable. They are essentially kin based groups depending on descent and marriage. Each group has claims to a particular body of mythology, to special sacred sites and their attendant ceremonies, and to clearly demarcated tracts of land. There are also differences of dialect and language.

3. In addition to these differences, which derive from their traditional past, there are differences arising out of their more recent histories. These differences concern the size of the groups, the present location of the groups, the dispersal of group members, their economic, educational and political statuses, their acceptance of the Christian faith, their adoption of western values, the degree of social integration at work within each group, the rate of European genetic admixture and their aspirations for the future.

4. Each group has its own internal organisation. Each group has its own leader/s. These operate independently of outside groups. The status of the leader/s and his/their authority is/are not open to legitimate Aboriginal question.

5. There are no traditional mechaniams to keep these various distinct autonomous groups together permanently in one locality. The only way in which various groups have been able to co-exist in a settlement situation has been through the presence of an outside authority.

PART II - THE POLICY OF F.R.M.

The policy of the F.R.M. over the past ten years can be summarized as recognising the autonomy of the Aboriginal people amongst who it works and their own rights to make decisions affecting their own lives.

PART III - THE IMPLEMENTATION OF F.R.M. POLICY AT THE PRACTICAL LEVEL REVIEWED IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Beginning in the late 60's, F.R.M. attempted to hand over authority and decision making to the Hermannsburg "community" as a whole.

2. The concept of a council was introduced by F.R.M. The intention in western terms was to create a body which would be representative of what was assumed by F.R.M. to be the community of Hermannsburg. That body (council) was eventually to take full responsibility for the services provided through F.R.M. and the Special Purposes Lease held by F.R.M.

3. In the terms of the 650 Aborigines of Hermannsburg, such a council was a foreign concept and proved to be an instrument of tension. It placed certain Aborigines (councillors) in positions of interference over the existing internal organisation of other groups to which they themselves did not belong. According to Aboriginal custom and law, members of these groups refused to concede to Aborigines, other than those specifically designated within their own group, any right to involve themselves in the life of the group or to make decisions or arrangments on their behalf. Clearly, this restricted the capacity of the councillors to deal with each other or to make decisions or arrangements for people who did not belong to their own group.

4. Consequently, they (Aboriginal councillors) attempted to operate on the basis of non-Aboriginal concepts and principles. On the other hand, they utilised the resources available to them and their positions as councillors in a very Aboriginal way, primarily to direct benefits into the close relationship group to which they themselves belonged.

5. The fighting, increase in alcohol consumption and general chaos that developed as a result of the implementation of the council policy became intolerable to the various groups at Hermannsburg, causing some of them, at the beginning of 1974, to move away from the settlement and to establish outstations where they would be free to manage their own affairs.

6. The implementation of F.R.M. policy at the practical level had quite clearly failed. As F.R.M. withdrew (that is, handed over authority and decision making to the Hermannsburg "community" as a whole) other "outsiders" were

generated to take the place of the whites. These "outsiders" were the Aboriginal councillors on the various Aboriginal councils. The process had a number of consequences.

(a) It meant that nothing had changed as only new faces filled old positions.

(b) The new faces couldn't be trusted.

(c) A general apathy and a further disintegrating process resulted evidenced by increased "grog", fighting and tension.

PART IV - THE IMPLEMENTATION OF F.R.M. POLICY AT THE PRACTICAL LEVEL SINCE 1974

1. Research

(a) From the beginning of 1974 F.R.M. set up its own research programme. It was in a position to do this as:

i two of its staff were already fluent in the Aranda language,

ii three of its staff had completed a Summer Institute of Linguistics Course,

iii one of its staff in 1973 had spent a special year of study leave in the Department of Anthropology/Sociology at the University of Queensland, where he received basic training in Anthropological research. A number of Anthropologists who specialised in Aboriginal culture were also prepared to give practical advice, supervision and direction.

(b) The purpose of the research programme is to determine:

i the basic social organisation of the Aboriginal people,

ii the aspirations of the Aboriginal people,

iii what constitutes the environment in which Aboriginal people are free to make their own decisions, to take the responsibility and accountability for their own lives, and to generate their own independence economically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

Consultation and Decision making

(a) As has been already illustrated in Part III, imposed decision making machinery did not work. In order to come to a practical solution that would work without imposing western solutions, it was necessary for F.R.M. to know what was the decision making machinery in Aboriginal society. This meant establishing exactly where the real leadership and legitimate authority lies in Aboriginal terms and the principles on which it is based.

(b) Consequently, F.R.M. responds to and consults directly with the real leaders in matters which concern only their particular group. It does this because:

i it is the expressed wish of the leaders,

ii the individual leaders won't talk about their real concerns and aspirations in the presence of other Aborigines who are not directly a part of those concerns or aspirations, nor to white people who will divulge these to other Aborigines,

iii it frees the situation from interference from other outside Aborigines and the tension that creates, so that the groups can work towards generating their own independence and menaging their own affairs,

iv it is in this context that they can take responsibility and accountability for their own actions.

3. Aborigines Managing their own Affairs

(a) F.R.M. considered it absolutely essential to allow Aborigines to determine what they considered to be their own affairs, and the context in which they wished to manage them. The inherent danger in doing otherwise was for F.R.M. to again impose its own programmes with its own solutions.

(b) Early in 1974, when they began to move out to the outstations, Aborigines began to demonstrate their aspirations and priorities and where their solutions to the problems lay.

They were distinct groups who needed to cope with their own affairs and generate their own independence according to their own internal organisation.

4. The Provision of Services to which a number of Aboriginal Groups Require Access

(a) This class of services is not seen by Aboriginal groups as coming into the realm that is central to the managing of their own affairs because:

i there are no Aboriginal mechanisms by which they can corporately own or run them,

ii an alternative of one group running a service for others would, because of Aboriginal law, only lead to inequitable access, whereby certain groups and individuals would be privileged and other groups and individuals would be disadvantaged, leading to power struggles, conflict and tension,

iii they recognise that the management framework by which these services operate with continuity, reliability and predictability is based on western principles of management.

Consequently, the Aboriginal groups have determined that such services at this stage should be run by an outside body in a manner which recognises the basic requirements of their social organisation and have specifically requested F.R.M. to do this.

5. Specific to Education

F.R.M. recognises that Aboriginal societies have the right to the socialisation of their own children. It further recognises that:

i Aboriginal societies possess their own bodies of structured knowledge,

ii various in-appropriate environments pre-empt the transmission of that knowledge,

iii various Aborigines in accordance with kinship obligations and constraints have the authority and responsibility for the transmission of that knowledge to specific kinsfolk,

iv this knowledge is transmitted independently of any western type schooling.

Consequently, F.R.M. deploys teachers for schooling to the individual groups, in the organisational framework requested each group, to teach the specific skills requested by each group.

(c) Specific Health

F.R.M. Recognises that:

i Aboriginal groups have their own system in relation to:
- the cause, effect, prevention, diagnosis and cure of sickness,
- care of the patient,
- the explanation of the cause of death,

ii Aborigines recognise that the western medical system has an important relevance to health.

iii the presuppositions of the two systems are fundamentally different and in its opinion, attempts to embody one into the other have the effect of removing one and/or the other out of the context in which they are most effective,

iv there are no aboriginal mechanisms whereby the health service can be corporatley owned or run

Consequently, at the request of Aboriginal groups F.R.M. manages the Hermannsburg hospital in a manner that takes cognizance of their system.

(d) Specific to Housing

i there are three distinct and basic sets of social relationships which generate household living arrangements within Aborignial social groups. They are:
- father, mother and children to the age of puberty,
- boys from the age of puberty, single men and widowers,
- girls from the age of puberty, single women and widows.

ii Social obligations and responsibilities operate between these households according to kinship constraints.

iii These kinship obligations and responsibilities are also expressed at the level of "physical" dwelling arrangements.

iv A death in a group has effects on dwellings, causing re-locations, the vacating of dwellings, a re-shuffling of tenants or a combination of these.

v Movement and re-organisation also occur due to considerations of privacy, winds, visitors and other assorted factors.

vi F.R.M. recognises that the provision of housing must accomodate Aboriginal principles of housing - principles which place important constraints on the way that physical dwellings must be fitted into the pattern of the social life in which they are used.

Consequently, F.R.M. sees it as being imperative that the various groups determine:

- the basic design of their dwellings according to their needs,
- the location of their dwellings,
- who, according to their own principles will be involved in the construction and maintenance of their dwellings and have ownership and continuing responsibility for the dwellings.

5. Outstations

By establishing their own outstations, Aboriginal groups have determined the environments in which they can manage their own affairs according to their own internal organisation and generate their own independence economically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

6. Incorporations and Associations

(a) Incorporations and associations lay down certain basic rules that are consistent with western democratic concepts, for example, a quorum, committee, chairman, voting, minutes, etc. They are seen by Aboriginal groups as mechanisms of western society, and are not perceived as Aboriginal mechanisms. "They are white man's business". The Aboriginals who become officials in them, are seen as working for the "white man", the "government", or whatever. When these concepts are used by Aborigines, they are used in a very Aboriginal way, in an attempt to accommodate Aboriginal principles. The result is inconsistent with western intentions and also confounds the legitimate Aboriginal mecharisms. An inproprotionate amount of Aboriginal energies are consequently expended in their own legalities of the dilemma resulting in further disintegration evidenced by increased "grog", delinquent behaviour, tension and fighting.

(b) F.R.M. recognises that:

i each individual group has its own internal organisation,

ii these internal organising principles are upheld over and above foreign introduced concepts and principles.

Consequentaly, F.R.M. works with the internal organisation of each individual group.

7. Land

(a) F.R.M., prior to "Land Rights" being announced by Government, was negotiating the transfer of the Hermannsburg lease to the Aboriginals of Hermannsburg. It was envisaged by F.R.M. that the Town Council, or another body that they might like to nominate, would hold the title of the Lease. When they realised F.R.M. was serious about transferring the Lease to a conglomerate body, the tensions increased dramatically between the Aborigines at Hermannsburg generally, and the Aborigines at Hermannsburg and F.R.M. particularly.

(b) In 1975 leaders in the ceremonial area at Hermannsburg, invited the staff who were involved in the research programme to their initiation ceremonies. Their purpose was directly to make possible on their part, the giving of information specific to land. They wanted F.R.M. to know who owns/manages the various specific tracts of land and the principles on which these claims are based. They also made F.R.M. aware of the laws in relationship to land and the consequences of breaking these laws. These laws and consequently social peace can only be maintained if land is granted in such a way that gives full recognition to the traditional system of land ownership/management.

(c) F.R.M. consequently recognises that land, to be effectively granted, must be granted according to the Aboriginal traditional system of land ownership.

(d) Upon requests from the various land-owning groups, F.R.M. has been mapping their lands. This process includes producing maps showing the boundaries to the specific tracts of land.

PART V - SUMMARY

1. F.R.M. believes that the intention of Government in policy at the idealogical level, is not essentially different from its own. It does realise however, that at the practical level there are, in many instances radical differences.

2. F.R.M., in implementing its policy at the practical level, works on the basis of the known facts. As additional facts emerge it adapts its approach or radically changes its approach as it did in 1974.

STRELLEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL

THE STRELLEY MOB

The group operates four pastoral stations - Strelley, Coongan, Warralong and Carlindi - in the Port Hedland region of the Pilbara of Western Australia. Strelley itself was purchased by the group, then known as McLeod's Mob, in 1971. The Mob came together in 1946 following the strike by Aboriginal stations workers. Theirs has been a long struggle for basic human rights, a history of self-management and self-determination dating from long before these became stated government policies towards Aborigines. A community school was established at Strelley in 1976 and in 1979 an annex to that school was set up at Warralong homestead, some 90 km by road from Strelley.

WHY A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

"One time we sent some kids to the government school and they never knew us when they came back. Those kids are broken people now"*. So says Billy Thomas, a community leader. The mob was once refused a government school and later refused to consider sending children to school in Port Hedland. It was not until the seventies when 'alternative schools' were starting up in the Southern capitals that the necessary climate for the establishment of an Aboriginal community school existed. The community was not willing to accept a school where personnel were not accountable to them. They wanted a school, but on their own terms.

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION: THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

The rights of different ethnic and religious communities in Australia to promote and protect different aspects of their collective identities through educational intervention have long been recognised by Australian governments. The rights of Aboriginal parents to have some say in the education of their children have not.

Children of black mothers and white fathers were often forcibly removed from Aboriginal society and sent to mission schools. Years later, some of these people have risen to prominence as advisers to different state and federal departments. Australian governments can thus point to 'Aboriginal" people apparently voicing Aboriginal opinion. Unfortunately, through no fault of their own, such people have been deprived of the cultural heritage required to legitimate and authentic spokesmen: traditional authorities have never delegated to them the right to speak or make decisions on their behalf. The Strelley community's desire to run its own school can best be viewed against this backdrop of injustice whereby Aboriginal authority was first completely by-passed and later distorted.

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* broken people is the local term for fringe-dweller

THE STRUCTURE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION AT STRELLEY

At Strelley, the authority of the people to educate and be educated in the way they wish is vested in a full community meeting. Authority over the daily running of the school resides in the school committee. These two structures control the hiring of teachers and the setting of employment conditions, the division of adults and children into different school classes; the positioning of all school classes and activities; the selection of adults to work as teachers with the white personnel; and the approval or rejection of proposed teaching programmes, curricula and teaching materials. Teachers are directly accountable to these structures and through them the community has continually emphasised areas it wants the school to respect and support:

1. The social customs of the people
2. The local economy
3. The religion of the people
4. The major local languages

HOW THE STRUCTURE WORKS

1. The institution of avoidance relationships is a central fact of Aboriginal social life: it is highly painful for an Aboriginal man to be placed in a face situation with a person his Law obliges him to avoid. At Strelley, the community has divided the school into skin sections, which are physically separated so that such contact does not occur. These kinship clusters are socially congenial whereas the alternatives such as age and ability groupings were regarded as socially threatening. Thus, at Strelley, we talk about the Milangka-Panaka group rather than about grade three.

Furthermore, the school-age programmes generally take place in the camps where what goes on is visible to the community: accountability is local and immediate. White teachers sign a contract requiring them to respect the rules and customs of the community. They are not, for example, permitted to consume alcohol on Strelley; and they are expected to work closely with the relatives assigned to them when they are allocated a skin section.

2. In early discussions, the community indicated that the school was viewed as a vehicle for social cohesion and for economic independence, not as a vehicle for outward social mobility. For this reason the school at Warralong was set up and for this reason only English and mathematics are taught in the school-age programmes: functional English based on local situations and functional mathematics based on local economic imperatives. Most teaching materials in literacy and numeracy are produced by the teachers: children learn to read about fencing and shearing and making tables rather than being presented with the mysteries of Dick and Dora.

3. Over the years, the Strelley community has consistently opposed the tendency of white society to treat the Aboriginal religion as a tourist attraction. The school has been asked to stay out of this area: the community reviews books and other teaching materials coming into the school and rejects items in conflict with the tenets of the religion of the people. White personnel are generally informed about it if their behaviour in some way offends against religious belief.

4. The community stipulated that Strelley be a bi-lingual school. The Nyangumarta programme began in 1976 and the Manyjilyjarra programme in 1978.

These are central to all school activities and have engendered great enthusiasm. Two teacher-linguists are employed and work mainly with adults. The content and direction of these programmes is entirly community controlled.

The bi-lingual programmes depend on the production of books. The production centre which houses the printing press is therefore the centre of the school. A production supervisor is employed to teach printing techniques to adults selected by the communtiy. The production of a tri-lingual newspaper, 'Mikurrunya' is an example of their efforts.

THE FUTURE

Many people were sceptical about the Strelley school at its inception. "It's an experiment; it won't last", they said. In fact the principles upon which the school rests, community control and bilingualism, could hardly be described as 'experimental', although they have not received star billing in Australia. Perhaps it is time they did.

For further information contact:

The nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation,
462 Belmont Avenue,
Kewdale,
W.A. (tel. 4581567)